

Saudi Gives \$20 Million to Georgetown

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A prominent Saudi businessman said yesterday that he is donating \$20 million each to Georgetown and Harvard universities for the study of Islam and the Muslim world as part of his philanthropic efforts to promote interfaith understanding.

Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal, a member of the Saudi royal family, said in a telephone interview from the Saudi capital of Riyadh that he also has donated \$15 million to establish the Middle East's first two centers for American studies, at universities in Beirut and Cairo.

"As you know, since the 9/11 events, the image of Islam has been tarnished in the West," said Alwaleed, who is chairman of the Riyadh-based Kingdom Holding Co. and has extensive business holdings in Europe and the United States.

He said his gifts to Georgetown and Harvard will be used "to teach about the Islamic world to the United States," and the new programs at American University in Beirut and American University in Cairo will "teach the Arab world about the American situation."

The \$20 million gift to Georgetown is the second-largest ever received by the Jesuit-run university, school officials said. It will be used to expand the activities of the university's 12-year-old Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

"We are deeply honored by Prince Alwaleed's generosity," said a statement from Georgetown President John J. DeGioia, who met Alwaleed Nov. 7 in a Paris hotel to sign documents formalizing the donation.

Alwaleed, a grandson of the Saudi kingdom's founder, King Abdel Aziz, tried to give \$10 million to the Twin Towers Fund shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. But then-New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani rejected the donation after the prince said in a news release that the United States needed to "re-examine its policies in the Middle East and adopt a more balanced stance towards the Palestinian cause."

Asked about the controversy over his New York gift, Alwaleed replied that "this is behind us and now we are working for the present and the future. . . . My love and admiration to the United States was never diminished."

The Georgetown center, part of the university's School of Foreign Service, will be renamed the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. The \$20 million will endow three faculty chairs, expand programs and academic outreach, provide scholarships for students and expand library facilities, Alwaleed said.

Center director John L. Esposito said in an interview that "a significant part of the money will be used to beef up the think tank part of what the center does."

Up to now, he said, the center has not had enough resources "to respond to the tremendous demand that is out there, from the government, church and religious groups, the media and corporations to address and answer issues like, 'What is the actual relationship between the West and the Muslim world? Is Islam compatible with modernization?' Now we can run workshops and conferences [on these subjects] both here and overseas."

When asked about the comments that caused the rejection of Alwaleed's gift to New York, Esposito said: "There is nothing wrong with his expressing his opinion on American foreign policy. Clearly, it was done in a constructive way. He was expressing his enormous sympathy with the United States but also trying to give people the context in which this [terrorist attack] occurred."

Alwaleed said his \$20 million donation to Harvard will fund its Islamic studies program, which crosses many disciplines.

Harvard President Lawrence H. Summers expressed gratitude to Alwaleed, saying in a statement yesterday that his gift "will enable us to recruit additional faculty of the highest

caliber, adding to our strong team of professors . . . [in] this important area of scholarship."

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